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How Does Google+ Local Impact Your Local Business?



Local consumers today spend a great deal online trying to find local businesses who have what they need or want – this includes food, entertainment, banking, shopping, auto repair, hair care, massages, lawn care, and the list goes on and on.

According to Google, one in five searches includes a “location,” which prompted them to create a solution that will help businesses attract new local customers.

Today, that solution is Google+ Local, which is a portal of business profile listing pages that replaced what was once known as the popular “Google Places.”

In an attempt to make local search more effective and interesting, Google created Google+ Local by integrating Google Places with their new social network, Google+ (also known as Google Plus or G+).

Similar to Facebook pages, Google+ has already gained massive popularity in the social networking arena due to the fact that it is owned by the largest and most powerful online search engine; Google itself. Therefore, Google+ Local is expected to receive the same level of success as it creates a unique, yet effective way for small businesses to gain local online exposure.

Google+ Local pages allow business owners to market to local consumers by letting them know where they are located as well as providing them with other important information about their companies.

Just as the Yellow Pages book lists services and products according to their locations, Google+ Local does the same thing, but it's done electronically which makes it even more powerful. In fact, it delivers extremely targeted results based on search phrases that consumers enter into the search engines when looking for local products and services.

As a small business owner, you are probably always hunting for inexpensive ways to put your business in front of your local consumers. Since consumers today spend a great deal of time online researching businesses, an online presence is no longer an option – it's a must. A Google+ Local Page is one way to accomplish this goal by helping you establish a strong online presence geared specifically to your local consumers.

If you are familiar with Google Places, you have probably noticed that the listing pages don't look quite the same. Your previous Google Places page has likely been migrated over to Google+ Local already by Google. If this is the case, consumers are now directed to your Google+ Local page instead of your previous Google Places page and you're wondering if there's anything you should do on your end.

The following changes have occurred as a result of the Google pages transition:

- Google Places pages are now Google+ Local pages
- A "Local" tab has been added to Google+ so users can easily search for and recommend specific Google+ Local pages
- The Zagat review and scoring system has replaced Google's old five-star system
- Google+ Local pages integrate with Google Search, Google Maps, and Google Mobile Maps

In this report, we will help you understand:

- The important features of the new Google+ Local
- How Google+ Local differs from Google Places
- How all of this it impacts your business
- How all of this impacts your local target audience (consumers)

Google+ Local in a Nutshell

Google+ Local (<http://plus.google.com/local>) is a free service that is a part of the Google search engine that focuses specifically on businesses and their locations. These pages are now integrated with Google's social networking site, Google+ and also link to Google Maps, Organic Search, and Google Mobile Maps. They display a list of companies in the area that offer services or products based on the user's search terms.

When local customers go online to search for products or services in their local area, most of them stop in the Google+ Local section to find businesses who can meet their needs.

Here's a sample Google+ Local search result with the term "Los Angeles Caterer."

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www.langersdeli.com/

Zagat: **26** / 30 - 681 Google reviews

[Cicada](#)

www.cicadarestaurant.com/

Zagat: **23** / 30 - 345 Google reviews

[Joan's on Third Cafe](#)

www.joansonthird.com/

Zagat: **23** / 30 - 501 Google reviews

[Radisson hotel at Los Angeles Airport](#)

radissonlax.com/

Score: **12** / 30 - 60 Google reviews

[Papa Cristo's](#)

papacristos.com/

Zagat: **22** / 30 - 255 Google reviews

[Patina Restaurant](#)

www.patinarestaurant.com/

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B 704 South Alvarado Street
Los Angeles
(213) 483-8050

C 617 South Olive Street
Los Angeles
(213) 488-9488

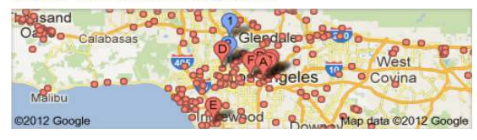
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Los Angeles
(323) 655-2285

E 6225 West Century Boulevard
Los Angeles
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F 2771 West Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles
(323) 737-2970

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Not only is Google+ Local a great source to provide information about your business, such as the type of services and/or products you offer, photos of your office, your hours of operation, payment methods and directions, but this is where your customers can leave reviews about your business for others to see.

You may have noticed that the former 5-star rating system that we knew with Google Places is completely gone. Instead you will see the new Zagat scores for each business in the search results. Customer reviews play a huge part in these scores, but they entail many other factors. We will discuss Zagat in more detail later in this report.

When a user performs a search for a specific type of product or service in their local area, Google+ Local recommends places based on places they've liked and reviewed in the past, as well as places their friends have liked.

Google+ Local also recommends places based on the specified location to generate geo-targeted results. Users also have the capability to perform searches for local businesses all within their Google + Local accounts.

In addition, your customers can easily review your business as well as recommend your business to their family, friends, and colleagues all within the Google + Local pages platform.

Why the Change from Google Places to Google+ Local?

Initially, when Google was launching Places, they thought that it would be an efficient means for merchants and their customers to communicate. For some reason, this did not turn out to be the case with part of the blame going to the limitations found on the Places platform.

Therefore, Google decided to merge Google Places with their new social networking site, Google+; creating the new Google+ Local pages. This simply means that when searching for different locations online, searchers will be directed to Google+ Local pages in place of Google places.

Google+ Local gives local business owner a powerful marketing and interaction tool that allows them to communicate with their customers freely via Google's social network setting.

These new local listing pages have made headlines in the internet world because of the new-age, social marketing factor associated with them.

If you don't spend a lot of time reading news online, then you may have missed this important piece of information, or you might have experienced the replacement already.

This change may seem annoying to a lot of business owners as well as consumers, but all we can do is embrace it and utilize the new solution to its full advantage.

As a business owner, going from Google Places to the all the new and dynamic Google+ Local pages is inevitable. With most, if not all the Google Places profiles automatically changed to Google+ Local, the only thing left for us to do is to enjoy the benefits that come with it. Google+ Local pages are appealing and have a wide range of features that will prove to be vital in any online marketing campaign.

The change is aimed at giving users a more "active" feel and offers features that work towards benefiting your target audience; therefore making your business stand out. In other words, your Google Places listing is not totally gone; it has just turned social.

Either way, there is no need to panic; this report will shed the much needed light on the essentials of Google+ Local pages to help you adapt to the changes.

What Does Your Business Need to Do?

If Your Business Already Had a Verified Google Places Page:

Google+ Local pages are generated automatically for any business that had a prior Google Places page. As of right now, you should still manage your listing through the Google Places platform.

However, if you do not have a Google+ account, you should setup an account in order to really take your listing to the next level.

If Your Business Did Not Have a Verified Google Places Page:

If you did not have a verified Google Places page, you can still claim your company listing via the Google Places platform. If you did not have a page at all, you can also setup a Google+ Local page by signing up to Google's social networking site, Google+ (or Google Plus).

Either way, be sure to complete your listing as much as possible for the best results; use your real address and a local phone number, fill out all fields, carefully incorporate targeted keywords in the "description," and upload as many pictures as possible to fully optimize your listing.

Once your page is verified, start using the many tools located within Google+ that will eventually be responsible for helping you gain even more exposure. This includes joining circles, encouraging your customers to leave reviews, posting updates about your business, and more.

Google+ Local Features

There are several powerful features that have been introduced with the new Google+ Local pages and all are aimed at making life easier for business owners when it comes to enhancing their online presence. Not only that, but these features make it simple for users to rate businesses, recommend businesses, and find businesses who have what they are looking for.

Here's more information about how you can get involved with Google+ local to grow your business and an overview of some of its features:

Google+ Local Tab

Google+ now offers a "Local" tab on sidebar. This tab will take users to the Google+ Local platform, which is where they can search for local businesses. When they click on a listing, they will be taken to that business' Google+

Local page where they will have access to information such as photos, Zagat scores and summaries, reviews, and contact information.

The New Zagat Scoring System

Google acquired Zagat in September 2011, which allowed them to bring more than 35,000 reviews and scores across 100 countries to the Google+ community. The latest "Local" effort is a year in the making, according to Google.

Now, users can make smart decisions when it comes to choosing local businesses. Zagat provides a summary of user reviews and an extensive scoring system that helps consumers make decisions based on several factors.

Each and every Google+ Local page will have Zagat scores and summaries. The scores appearing on the pages will be based on a scale of 30 points, which represents average scores of individual scores by different reviewers. There is a summary at the top of the pages, which is an aggregation of highlights collected from different reviews by users.

Zagat's Google+ Local Scores

All scores in Google+ Local are determined by user reviews; these individual user ratings are based on a point scale from 0-3:

- 3 = Excellent
- 2 = Very Good
- 1 = Good
- 0 = Poor to Fair

These ratings are then averaged and multiplied by 10 to get an average score:

- 26-30 = Extraordinary to Perfect
- 21-25 = Very Good to Excellent
- 16-20 = Good to Very Good

- 10-15 = Fair to Good
- 0-9 = Poor to Fair

One of the most powerful features of Google+ Local is its built-in customer review and new Zagat scoring system; traditional advertising methods such as the Yellow Pages book can't come close to offering consumers with helpful information such as this.

This technology helps consumers make the best decisions when it comes to choosing local businesses. For instance, a restaurant may have excellent food, but their service is not good. So you may see that the Zagat score is 26 for "Food" and "8 for Service." Depending on why the user may be looking for a restaurant, the scoring system will help them make the best choice.

Better Photos

For businesses that depend heavily on pictures to market their products and services, the deal just got better with Google+ Local pages. Google+ Local allows users to post larger images with a much more visual approach. It is therefore easier to showcase your business and rest assured that your audience sees your business just as you would like them to see it.

Ranking and Indexing

Search engines will index all the Google+ Local pages, which is a new door to more opportunities for many businesses because Google Places pages were never indexed. Businesses with multiple locations and/or optimized pages will enjoy the benefits of this feature.

Google+ Local Pages are now inherently social and the rankings on Google are now using social signals. So this means that any review on Google+ Local will work positively towards a higher ranking on the Google search engine.

This makes Google+ Local a vital part of every business's online marketing campaign. For those businesses that want to really capitalize on this amazing tool, the more socialization, the better.

The main reason Google merged/replaced Google Places with Google+ Local is to give businesses a chance to utilize social content, which is more effective than just showing users the business name, address, and phone number. Instead, users can interact with businesses on a more personal level and vice versa.

Plus 1's

Visitors are now able to +1 local business pages. This is an important feature because it affects the appearance of your page in search results. When someone gives your business page a +1, your page will appear in different Google products to the user's friends. Google has simply turned word of mouth into a digital powerhouse. Everyone knows that there is no stronger marketing method than your customers' word of mouth.

Map Integration

Google has also included maps in Google+ Local pages. This will allow your customers to familiarize themselves with the location of your business and make it easy for them to find your physical store upon demand.

What Does All of This Mean to Your Prospects and Customers?

Finding the best places to go for local products and services is an essential part of our daily lives. No longer do we pick up the Yellow Pages book to find local businesses; most people flock to the internet first.

Google+ Local makes finding trusted businesses online much easier than ever before.

With Google+ Local, users can:

- Quickly and easily find local businesses in their area who have what they are looking for – along with reviews, photos, and other helpful information
- Instantly get place recommendations based on their Google+ circles, their past reviews, and their geo-targeted location
- Find reviews from people they know and trust in the search results
- Write reviews of their favorite businesses

- Experience easy use via integration with other Google search products

Let's take a closer look at some of these features:

Find Local Businesses

Now, Google+ users can find businesses who offer products and services in a particular area right within the Google+ Local console. Once they are logged in to Google+, they will have two search boxes at the top of the screen. They will enter what they're looking for (hotel, book store, auto repair shop, etc.) in the first box.

In the second box, they will enter the desired location for the product or service. They can enter the city name, zip code, state, or even the street intersections. These searches will bring up a list of businesses for them to view and Google+ will make recommendations for places it thinks they will like based on their reviews and suggestions from top viewers.

Get Recommendations and Reviews from People They Know and Trust

Google+ Local focuses on enhancing the business experience by centralizing opinions, recommendations and reviews from each user's Google+ Circles. This means that any search conducted via Google maps, organic search and Google+ Local pages will incorporate results from the user's Google+ Circle connections.

For example if a user searches for "Mexican food," they will also see a Mexican restaurant that has been recommended by a friend in their circle. The results might include a friend's rave review of the Baja-style taco stand in your neighborhood – that will probably end up being lunch for today.

This is good because people trust the opinions of friends, family or other close sources; in life, these are the people we usually go to when looking for

suggestions when it comes to finding the best products and services.

One major difference in Google+ Local from Google Places is that now consumers are required to have a Google+ account in order to leave reviews for businesses. This is to bring more credibility to the reviews being left as well as to streamline the whole social factor of this new listing center.

From the new "Local" tab on the left-hand side of Google+, users can search for specific places or browse ones that fit the products or services they are seeking. When the results come up, users will see businesses that Google+ recommends based on reviews and opinions of the people who are in this users' Circle, along with other factors.

Easily Review Their Favorite Local Businesses

Today, most people love to go online to tell the world about businesses that they love; this includes writing detailed reviews regarding their experiences with these businesses. Google+ Local makes it extremely easy for them to give their opinions about businesses online.

When businesses have a lot of great reviews attached to their local listing pages, consumers automatically flock to those listings simply because they believe and trust what other people say. Therefore, if your business has a lot of glowing reviews, you can expect to see great results from your Google+ Local listing over time.

On the other hand, people also like to tell the world about bad experiences with businesses. This is to be expected in most cases, but should not scare you. As long as the good reviews outweigh the bad ones, your business will continue to grow via proper online exposure.

To review businesses, users are now required to have a Google+ account so their name is attributed to the review. Also, any reviews that were transferred over to Google+ Local from Google Places will show up as "A Google User" until they create a Google+ account.

It may be a good idea to let your customers know this piece of information when requesting them to go online to leave a review for your business. This way, they will know what to expect and will want to learn more about this exciting new platform.

Google+ Local Goes Across Multiple Search Products

Google+ Local is also integrated across other products that users already use every day, such as Google Maps, Organic Search, and Mobile Maps search. For instance, if they are looking for a place on Organic Search, Maps, or Mobile, your Google+ Local page will show up there as well.

Conclusion

Although Google Places was more than enough for some people, the merger with the more socially set Google+ has brought with it many opportunities and impressive features for all business owners who decide to take this road.

The highlight of this switch for business owners is the fact that they will get a chance to socialize with their customers, which increases loyalty and popularizes your brand.

The main limitation that existed in Google Places was the inability to consistently interact with customers and clients; this is all in the past as Google+ Local pages offer a more functional and one-on-one social approach to marketing.

Constant communication with customers means that business owners can easily convince their loyal customers to give reviews. Reviews are crucial when looking for new customers as they are what most people depend on when trying to find products and services. Reviews will assist your business in standing out from the crowd as well as and give consumers a reason to choose you.

If you have great services and products, you will enjoy impressive ratings that will work positively towards acquiring new customers. People believe

what other shoppers say about businesses, so it is up to you to take advantage of this fact and let Google+ Local ratings do the marketing for you.

Most business people feel as though their hands are too full to deal with new-age, digital marketing channels such as social media and internet marketing; so they simply put it on the backburner, which is a huge mistake.

Due to the massive level of internet usage today, all businesses should do everything they can to build an online presence. Google is here to stay and has made it easy for small businesses to access effective marketing tools that will help them gain exposure.

One enduring challenge for many small businesses is finding a way to be competitive in their marketplace. Implementing cost-effective strategies to get your company's message in front of consumers is one of the keys to successfully generating more leads, customers, and sales for your business.

Google+ Local is an avenue that every small business should take advantage of if they really want to compete with the corporate giants in their industry.

Setting up and managing a Google+ Local listing page is not extremely difficult, but it can be very daunting, time-consuming, and ineffective if not done properly.

I work with local businesses in the area by helping them gain more online exposure in order to boost sales while reducing advertising costs. If you would like some help with your Google+ Local page, contact me at THESELFDEFENCEEXPERT.COM for a consultation.

I look forward to speaking to you.

Thank you,

Andrew Holland – The Self Defence Expert.com

